Two Great MMPI–2 Books

A Review of

MMPI–2: Assessing Personality and Psychopathology (4th ed.).
by John R. Graham

MMPI–2: A Practitioner's Guide
by James N. Butcher (Ed.)
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Reviewed by
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MMPI–2: Assessing Personality and Psychopathology by John R. Graham is an extremely useful book for users of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory—2 (MMPI–2). The MMPI–2 is probably our best personality test. That is partly due to all the research that has been done on it, but in large measure it is due to the way the test is constructed, with, among other things, validity scales to see if the person took the test honestly, as well as clinical scales to see what kind of psychopathology the person has. It is also important that the test is empirically based, comparing scores of clinical groups to those of control groups of normal people. There are also some problems in how the test was constructed, with, for example, the Masculinity–Femininity scale being constructed in a dubious fashion.

I found the MMPI and its revision, the MMPI–2, to be extremely useful when I worked in a state mental hospital and in a prison. The latter was a treatment program, and about one third of our prisoners were psychotic. This does not mean that this is the percentage of prisoners who are psychotic in your typical prison, as in our system the treatment programs were where psychotic or emotionally disturbed prisoners were sent. But it was important to have a test that would pick up serious pathology in our prisoners, and the MMPI–2 often did the trick, just as it had at the state mental hospital, where the issue was more “What kind of pathology does this person have?”

New Scales

The MMPI–2 is complex. Not just anyone can use it. Training is needed. Reading is needed. That is why an excellent book like MMPI–2: Assessing Personality and Psychopathology is needed. As in earlier editions, Graham does an excellent job of showing the intricacies of using the MMPI–2. This fourth edition presents two new sets of scales, the Reconstructed Clinical scales that emphasize clinical interpretation and try to make the scales more distinctive (as opposed to overlapping) and the Personality Psychopathology scales that deal with both normal and abnormal personality.

Too Much Pathology

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the MMPI–2 (and its predecessor, the MMPI) is that it is so pathology oriented. Thus, it has limited use with normal people. In fact, it can lead to great errors when used with people who are basically normal
by leading to a pathological view of them. The Personality Psychopathology scales attempt to overcome this, but in my opinion even these scales tend to have mostly a pathology-oriented bias. So, the test is probably of greatest usefulness when psychopathology is present or expected. When used with normal people, the test's tendency to call a normal person a schizophrenic or something similar is too great.

**Structure of the Book**

The book has 13 chapters and also has Appendixes A–T. The appendixes deal briefly with technical issues. The chapters deal with such things as administration and scoring, the validity scales, the clinical scales, psychometric issues, use with special groups, forensic applications of the MMPI–2, and much more.

All in all, this is a great book if one is interested in or using the MMPI–2. It requires the reader have some degree of knowledge about the test, as otherwise it might be very difficult to follow in places. For MMPI–2 users, however, this book is excellent and one of the best books they could own.

**The Edited Book**

*MMPI–2: A Practitioner's Guide* is an edited volume by James N. Butcher. The chapters are in four sections: Perspectives on MMPI–2 Interpretation, Applications for the MMPI–2 in Assessment and Therapy, Applications of the MMPI–2 Across Diverse Populations (e.g., outpatient setting, medical setting, prison setting, and more), and Special Considerations in MMPI–2 Interpretation. This last section has three chapters, dealing with computer-based assessment, Latino/Latina MMPI–2 profiles, and cross-cultural applications of the MMPI–2. All these are important areas and not obvious without research and study.

**Different Settings**

Although people may be most interested in reading about MMPI–2 use in their particular setting, it is very educational to know how the MMPI–2 functions in other settings as well. From personal experience, I know that people may take the MMPI–2 with a particular set in order to look normal or to look pathological. Fortunately, the validity scales such as F (Infrequency; often an indication of trying to appear more pathological than one is) or K (Correction; often an indication of defensiveness, trying to appear more normal than one is) can often pick such things up and alert us to an invalid, deceptive profile. Also, there are different issues in different settings. With the psychotic person, there may be a problem of whether the person can understand the items; with the imprisoned person, there may be motivational questions about how cooperative they want to be. Also, drawing from my prison work, many prisoners are in a state of constant depression as a result of being incarcerated. Might that not influence how they answer items?

I heard of one prisoner who tested out as mentally retarded on an IQ test while in prison, but later scored in the genius category after being released. There could be several reasons for this, from depression to willful dishonesty in taking the IQ test, but it raises the issue of what a test score or profile might really mean.

**Discuss More?**

I found all the chapters helpful. I could understand just about everything, with my greatest problems coming with things I was not familiar with. For example, I know about all of the typical validity scales, but not so much about variable response inconsistency or true response inconsistency. I found the discussion of these two validity scales (Chapter 7, “Treatment Planning With the MMPI–2,” p. 147) too brief to really bring me up to snuff on them. I wish the authors had discussed them more, with a more detailed explanation.
Valuable Books

The edited Butcher book is quite useful for people using the MMPI–2. It will help them a lot to read about how the MMPI–2 is used in different settings and about some of the basics of the MMPI–2. And the Graham book provides great understanding of MMPI–2 research and issues.

These two books are terrific for MMPI–2 users or for people trying to learn about the MMPI–2. I highly recommended both.